

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
Water Resources Division  
Water Rights Bureau

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact**

**Part I. Proposed Action Description**

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: Weyerhaeuser Company  
PO Box 1990  
Columbia Falls, MT 59912
2. Type of action: Groundwater Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit 76LJ  
30107261
3. Water source name: Groundwater
4. Location affected by project: E2 Section 7, Township 30N, Range 20W, Flathead  
County
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:

The proposed appropriation is from three groundwater wells located in the W2E2 Section 7, Township 30N, Range 20W, Flathead County. The proposed appropriation is 1.84 cubic feet per second (CFS) up to 697.8 acre-feet (AF) per year for industrial and lawn & garden irrigation (1.65 acres) use. The proposed period of use for industrial use is January 1-December 31. The proposed period of use for lawn & garden irrigation use is April 20-October 10.

The DNRC shall issue a water use permit if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-311 MCA are met.

6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (DFWP)  
Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)  
Montana Natural Heritage Program  
National Wetlands Inventory  
USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey



## **Part II. Environmental Review**

### **1. Environmental Impact Checklist:**

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

### **WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION**

**Water quantity** - Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.

*Determination:* No significant impact

The source of supply is groundwater. The surface water sources identified to be hydraulically connected to the groundwater aquifer are the Flathead River and Flathead Lake. The Flathead River and Flathead Lake have been assessed for dewatering but have not been identified as chronically or periodically dewatered by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks.

**Water quality** - Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.

*Determination:* No significant impact

The reach of the Flathead River which will be depleted by groundwater pumping of the Applicant's wells has not been assessed for any beneficial uses by DEQ. Flathead Lake has been assessed and is identified by DEQ as not supporting aquatic life and fully supporting agriculture, primary contact recreation, and drinking water. It is not anticipated that pumping of the Applicant's groundwater well will have any negative impacts on the water quality of the Flathead River or Flathead Lake.

**Groundwater** - Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.

*Determination:* No significant impact

The Applicant is proposing to divert a flow of 1.84 CFS up to 697.8 AF annually from the groundwater aquifer. A Department memo dated January 10, 2011, entitled "Legal Availability of Groundwater in the Flathead Deep Aquifer" states groundwater levels in the Deep Aquifer are effectively controlled by the Flathead River and Flathead Lake and a new groundwater use will not alter the regional gradient, and thus the aquifer flux. The Department's Depletion Report identifies that the new groundwater use will reduce discharge from the aquifer to the Flathead River and Flathead Lake in the amount equivalent to the consumptive use of the proposed diversion (418.9 AF per annum).

**DIVERSION WORKS** - Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.

*Determination:* No significant impact

The means of diversion (wells) has already been constructed. Since this is a groundwater appropriation, there will be no channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, dams, or riparian impacts to the Flathead River or Flathead Lake.

#### **UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES**

***Endangered and threatened species*** - Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any “species of special concern,” or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or “species of special concern.”

*Determination:* No significant impact

The Montana Natural Heritage Program identified a list of 15 animal species of concern within the township and range that the project is in. Of this list, the Canada Lynx, Grizzly Bear, and Bull Trout are listed as “threatened” by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Seven plant species of special concern were identified by the Montana Natural Heritage Program to potentially be in the project area. None of the plant species are identified as endangered or threatened by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. This project is located in a developed portion of the Flathead valley between US Hwy 2 and the BNSF railroad grade just to the west of Columbia Falls and it is not anticipated that any of the species of concern will be impacted by the proposed project.

Townsend’s Big-eared Bat	Wolverine	Hoary Bat	Canada Lynx	Little Brown Myotis	Fisher
Pygmy Shrew	Grizzly Bear	Great Blue Heron	Peregrine Falcon	Western Toad	Westslope Cutthroat Trout
Pygmy Whitefish	Bull Trout	Smoky Taildropper	Whitebark Pine	Deer Indian Paintbrush	Latah Tule Pea
Northern Buttercup	Aloina moss	Black golf club moss	Britton’s dry rock moss		

***Wetlands*** - Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.

*Determination:* No significant impact

The project area where water use will occur has already been developed as an industrial plant. A review of the National Wetlands Inventory identifies a small freshwater forested/shrub wetland on the Applicant’s property but it is not located within the footprint of the industrial or lawn & garden irrigation use proposed by the applicant. It is not anticipated that issuance of a water use permit would have any effect on the wetland identified.

***Ponds*** - For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.

*Determination:* No significant impact

There were no natural ponds identified within the project area. The Applicant does have multiple man-made ponds used for collecting used process water and storm water to prevent runoff from leaving the site.

**GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE** - *Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.*

*Determination:* No significant impact

This proposed beneficial uses of this application are industrial and lawn & garden irrigation uses. It is not anticipated that any of these uses will have an impact on the soil quality, stability, or moisture content. The soils in the project area are Kiwanis loam, Mires gravelly loam, and Whitefish cobbly silt loam. The project area has already been developed into an industrial facility.

**VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS** - *Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.*

*Determination:* No significant impact

It is not anticipated that issuance of a water use permit will contribute to the spread of noxious weeds in the project area. Noxious weed prevention will be the responsibility of the individual landowner. Previous development likely has changed the composition of the flora within the area. Lawn & garden irrigation will benefit the existing vegetative cover.

**AIR QUALITY** - *Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.*

*Determination:* No significant impact

The Applicant has a Title V air quality operating permit (#OP2667-03) through the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. Issuance of a water use permit will not change any operation at the facility as the Applicant is coming into compliance with Montana water law and has already been using the water as proposed in this water use application.

**HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES** - *Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project if it is on State or Federal Lands. If it is not on State or Federal Lands simply state NA-project not located on State or Federal Lands.*

*Determination:* N/A- Project not located on State or Federal Lands.

**DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY** - *Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed.*

*Determination:* No other potential impacts have been identified.

## **HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

**LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS** - *Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.*

*Determination:* No known environmental plans or goals will be impacted by this project.

**ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES** - *Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.*

*Determination:* No access or recreational activities will be significantly impacted by this project.

**HUMAN HEALTH** - *Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.*

*Determination:* This proposed project will have no significant impact on human health.

**PRIVATE PROPERTY** - *Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.*

Yes\_\_\_ No X *If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.*

*Determination:* No regulatory impacts are known.

**OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES** - *For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.*

*Impacts on:*

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? No significant impacts identified
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No significant impacts identified
- (c) Existing land uses? No significant impacts identified
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No significant impacts identified
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No significant impacts identified
- (f) Demands for government services? No significant impacts identified
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? No significant impacts identified
- (h) Utilities? No significant impacts identified
- (i) Transportation? No significant impacts identified

(j) Safety? No significant impacts identified

(k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No significant impacts identified

**2. *Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:***

Secondary Impacts No significant impacts identified

Cumulative Impacts No significant impacts identified

**3. *Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:*** None

**4. *Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider:***

The only alternative to the proposed action would be the no action alternative. The no action alternative would not allow the Applicant to divert water for industrial use at their medium density fiberboard facility and irrigate 1.65 acres of lawn & garden. In this case, the Applicant has already been using water for the proposed uses and is attempting to come into compliance with Montana water law, therefore issuance of a water use permit will not change operations at the industrial facility.

**PART III. Conclusion**

**1. *Preferred Alternative***

Issue a water use permit if the Applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-311 MCA are met.

**2. *Comments and Responses***

None

**3. *Finding:***

Yes \_\_\_ No X Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

*If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:*

No significant impacts related to the proposed project have been identified.

*Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:*

Name: Nathaniel T. Ward

*Title:* Water Resource Specialist  
*Date:* December 21, 2016